

Congress Hall

Accessibility Book for Senate Chamber





From December 1790 until May 1800 the United States Congress met here in Philadelphia's newly constructed County Courthouse (now called Congress Hall). Pictured above is the meeting place of the U.S. House of Representatives. In this room, on March 4, 1797, the first peaceful transfer of executive power took place with the inauguration of President John Adams.

Stairway to Senate chamber and offices



To journey from the House Chamber to the Senate Chamber, a visitor must climb a steep wooden staircase and walk down a long hallway, passing several offices used by committees and secretaries.



Second Floor hall looking south into
the Senate chamber

On the second floor there are four side rooms; the large one pictured here was used by the secretaries of the Senate. On any given day, they would be hard at work transcribing letters, sending out correspondence and even filing important documents.



Secretaries' Office, East side of building

Secretaries' Office, looking right





In the 18th Century, it was typical to tie red ribbon around official documents. Eventually, people began describing government bureaucracy as being “tied up in Red Tape”

Committee Rooms

Further down the hallway, just before the Senate chamber, you will find 3 more rooms, a Joint Committee and West and East Committee Rooms. Committee work is where the Senators spent most of their time.



Joint Committee Room



East Committee Room



West Committee Room
and Library of Congress

These portraits of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette hang inside the East and West Committee Rooms. Both are replicas given to the park by the French government in 1976. The originals were gifts to Congress and were displayed in this manner while Congress used this building. Taken with the government move to Washington, DC, the portraits disappeared during the War of 1812.



Louis XVI, King of France



Marie Antoinette, Queen of France

This image hangs on the wall in the East Committee room. It is an engraving by Amos Doolittle entitled: *Display of the United States of America*. Doolittle's symbolic linking of the state seals and the Great Seal represented the newly confirmed federal union.



Doolittle, Amos. *Display of the United States of America*, New Haven CT. c. 1790. This linked chain of States was a popular symbol in the United States: it also appeared as the central motif in the carpet designed by William Peter Sprague for the Senate Chamber.

U.S. Senate Chamber

When Congress left Philadelphia in 1800, the U.S. Senate had grown from its original number of 26 Senators (2 for each state) to 32. During the ten years Philadelphia was the capital, three new states joined the union. Vermont, Kentucky and Tennessee were added in 1791, 1792 and 1796.



Over half of the chairs in the Senate Chamber are original to the building.



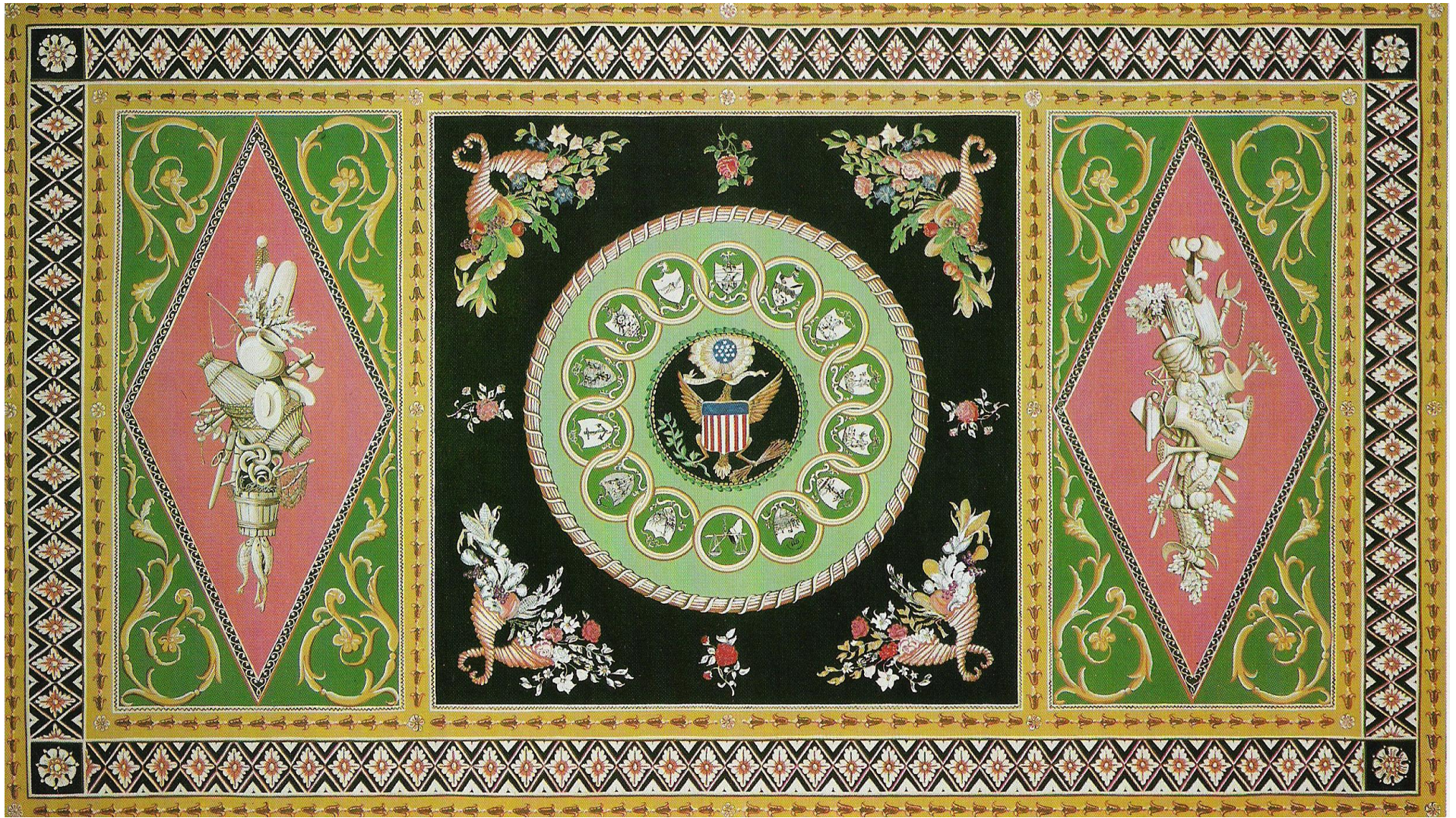
To the left is the President of the Senate's area. The Constitution designates the Vice President of the U.S. as the head of the Senate. In the 1790's Vice Pres. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson served here.



In December 1795, the U.S. Senate permanently opened its doors to the public. Prior to that date, the Senate met behind closed doors but relented after public and media outcries about meeting in secret. These galleries were added during a 1795 renovation of Congress hall.



On March 4, 1793, George Washington was sworn in for a second term as President of the U.S. in the Senate Chamber. Completely renovated later that year, Congress Hall was expanded by 26 additional feet to allow for a growing Congress. With the additions the Senate Chamber's location was pushed back and more offices were added to the second floor.



Carpet of U.S. Senate Chamber, the original was designed by William Peter Sprague of the Philadelphia Carpet Manufactory. The modern reproduction was made in Spain using the same process as the original.



This painting is located on the wall just above the President's desk in the Senate Chamber. Its exact date of origin is unknown but it most likely dates from 1800 – 1806 and may have been painted as a symbol of federal law in the District and Circuit court that took residence during the later period.